DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 950 FL 018 304

AUTHOR Lydon, James A.
TITLE From Gattegno to Freire: Musings on a Decade Gone By.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 12p.; In: Realizing the Dream. Selected Conference Proceedings; see FL 018 303.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Trends; *English (Second Language); *Learning Processes; Second Language Instruction; *Teaching Methods; *Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS Chomsky (Noam); Freire (Paulo); Gattegno (Caleb); Krashen (Stephen)

ABSTRACT

For language teaching, the early 1970s marked a break from the behaviorist hold of audio-lingualism and a new perspective derived from cognitive code psychology and Chomskian linguistics swept the profession. The wave of methods born of this perspective predominated for a decade. In general, the 1980s have had less to offer language teachers in terms of quick fixes. The 1980s have been characterized by shifts in the ways of viewing language teaching and learning, most notably Krashen's input hypothesis and the focus on learning processes. These changes have required a significant reorientation on the part of language teachers, and make the role for critical pedagogy meaningful in the language learning classroom. Critical pedagogy seeks to empower students through dialogue to achieve greater levels of social understanding and control. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED314950

From Gattegno to Freire: Musings on a Decade Gone By

James A. Lydon
LaGuardia Community College, CUNY

FL018304

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Gantzer

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

JAMES A. LYDON
LaGuardia Community College, CUNY

From Gattegno to Freire: Musings on a Decade Gone By[1]

Much has changed in the field of language teaching since, eight years ago, we were last in Buffalo for a NYS TESOL conference. In one sense, that year, 1979, can be understood as a transition year, one which marked the beginning of a shift away from an infatuation with methodology toward a more cerebral approach to language teaching and learning which began to take effect starting around 1980.

The early 1970s witnessed the irrevocable break from the behaviorist hold that audio-lingualism held on the language teaching world, and a fresh perspective, derived from cognitive code psychology and Chomskian linguistics, swept through the profession. The wave of methods born of this perspective, most notably the Silent Way and later Community Language Learning, held us in its sway for a good part of the decade. (Blair, 1982 and Oller & Richard-Amato, 1983 provide excellent accounts of these and several other methods.) It was a time when language teachers were identified by the methods they used, and conference workshops on methods were routinely filled with novice and experienced teachers alike each in their quest for the methodological "golden fleece" (Nadler, 1983). Alas, it was to no avail. By the end of the decade, things began to change. The question was still the same: "What method do you use?" but the answer was more likely to be "I am eclectic." And only a few short years later, the 1983 NYS TESOL conference theme asked the question, "Where Have All the Methods Gone?" The flood had receded.

In general, the eighties have had less to offer language teachers in terms of quick fixes. It does not take long to learn that quick fixes

[1]This is a slightly revised text of the President's Message delivered at the Seventeenth Annual New York State TESOL Conference, November 6-8, 1987 in Buffalo, New York.

are just that, quick and temporary at best. What appears at a conference to be a sure-fire technique designed to work on Monday morning most often does not. And those of use who saw this method or that as the answer to all of our problems, but who were not willing to swim down deeply to get to the foundations upon which the methods rested, were often in for disappointment.

Now I don't mean to suggest that the eighties have been uneventful, for although the current decade has not experienced the rush and excitement that characterized the seventies, I think that during the period of time since we were last here in 1979, we have undergone some pretty profound changes or, better, shifts in the way many of us view language teaching and learning. Two changes especially come to mind as having had a particularly significant impact: one is Krashen's input hypothesis (1982) and the other, the focus on learning processes. Not only have these two notions captured the imagination of many, and in so doing significantly altered our understanding of how languages are acquired, they have, more importantly, helped lay the groundwork for a potentially richer pedagogy yet to come and one which I will refer to later in this talk.

The input hypothesis posits that language is best acquired (some would say *only* acquired) in environments where learners are engaged in the language for the purpose of negotiating meaning and not when they are focused on the language as the object of study. The hypothesis suggests that in fundamental ways, the processes involved in second language acquisition are remarkably similar to those that children utilize to acquire their first language.

A good deal of research (see especially Gass and Madden, 1985) has lent support to the hypothesis, and approaches to the teaching of language have been modified as a result. More teachers, for instance, have developed a greater respect for an initial silent period where students at beginning levels of proficiency are given more opportunity to engage input without being required to attend much to production. This has led to a rethinking of the role of listening comprehension and its place in the language curriculum. (See Burling, 1982 for a good overview.) Similarly, much more attention has been placed on the efficacy of extensive reading as a rich source of input for learners. (See Krashen, 1985, especially chap. 7.) And in general, there has been a move away from presenting language in the context of grammatical items in favor of providing students with texts compelling, interesting, and challenging enough to draw students directly and intimately into the negotiation for meaning

without much conscious attention paid to the text's surface structure. In short, the input hypothesis has made the "making of meaning" a central focus in language learning.

A second major influence on the field of language teaching in the past few years has been the growing attention that we are now paying to the ways students go about the "doing" of learning. Most of us are most familiar with the impact that this idea has had on the teaching of writing, where many teachers now attend much more carefully to the process that students undergo in the production of a written piece. (See Raimes, 1985 and Zamel, 1985 for ESL application.) Efforts are made to work more closely with students to help them identify and define the processes that govern their production of text and to help them where possible to uncover more productive strategies.

The writing process movement has helped to bring to a level of awareness the need for audience and the demand that writing makes to be read. Students, as a result, are encouraged not only to develop a sense of audience but to serve as audience for their colleagues in mutual reading and critique of each other's work. For this to happen, writing needs to have purpose. No longer can we settle for what one writing process scholar has referred to as "writing by nobody for nobody" whose only purpose, in most ESL settings, at any rate, was to serve as a grammar test. We need to work toward the construction of writing contexts in which the need to write and to share writing will be obvious and compelling.

Interest in *how* students do what they do and how we can assist in identifying alternative strategies is not limited to writing. John Murphy (1985) has done research into the strategies students employ as they attempt to assign meaning to oral input—what we might call the listening process—and many of us are by now familiar with the work that has been done in the area of the reading process. (See Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983 for a good overview; see also Smith's classic on reading, 1982.) Schema theory, for example, has taught us that comprehension of text may be more a function of what's in a person's head, that is, what he or she brings to the text, than what is on the printed page. Whether or to what extent this is true, it seems to have become almost axiomatic that reading is a dynamic, interactive process between author and reader so that my understanding of the text, and therefore my interaction through the text with the author, cannot be yours because we each bring something different to it. Our varied understandings are themselves mediated through dialogue.

What I find of particular value in the process approach is the interaction and the dialogue that it encourages and its potential for eventual action. No longer the knower and judge, the teacher now serves in collaboration with the learner in a mutual discovery process that leads to a new state of knowing on the part of both teacher and student. Done well, student-to-student interaction can have the same empowering effect.

It is because of the radical reorientation that the input hypothesis and process theory require of language teachers that I believe that they are such an important influence on the profession. And what is especially exciting and refreshing about this new orientation is the shift in emphasis away from the language and onto the learner. It is from the learners that we must take our cues as we seek to provide input that is comprehensible, and it is only through constant interaction and dialogue with the learners, collectively and individually, that we can together discover the processes on which they rely to make meaning in the second language.

Come to think of it, perhaps we are not so far removed from the seventies as was first suggested. Wasn't the Silent Way, for example, really all about "the subordination of teaching to learning" (Gattegno, 1972)? Many of us overlooked this simple but profound prescription as we frantically tried to find our way through the maze of fidels and in search of more creative uses of cuisenaire rods after we finished our lessons on colors and comparatives. And it was Father Curran (1976) who taught us at the time that no matter what else, unless we were attending to the whole learner, including not insignificantly his affect, we could not expect much in the way of results. Here too, many of us mistook the medium for the message, and tape recorders and transcripts assumed a wrongful primacy in many of our classrooms.

The message of Curran and Gattegno was not about methods or techniques but about teaching and learning and especially about re-situating students back into their rightful place in that process. While they each developed elaborated methods, they would both no doubt agree that these methods are rendered meaningless without an approach upon which to found them. Approach, as Anthony (1972) has told us, is that set of assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning that we hold and that inform our classroom practice. It is, simply put, our theory. And it is the fundamental responsibility of TESOL professionals, as it is of all educators, to work constantly to fuse our theory and our practice.

The fusing of theory and practice is not a one-time event, and it should in no way be thought to be a static process. Rather, theory and practice exist in an ever changing dialectical relationship with each other—each continually forming and reforming the other as a result of ever new and different interactions with students and colleagues. Professional growth is the product of this dialectic. A wise person once observed that a teacher of ten years may be said to have ten years' experience or to have one year of experience repeated ten times. The variable here is professional growth, a process which is not easy, which does not come about in short order and which, to a large extent, depends upon a school environment which nurtures and encourages it.

Unfortunately, such environments are often hard to find in schools. The current bureaucratic structure of schools has made it possible, and for many attractive, to foreclose on their obligation to grow professionally and in so doing to bring to the classroom a continually evolving and refined pedagogic practice infused with theory—one that combines a depth of understanding of the teaching and learning process with, for language teachers, a sensibility to the classroom conditions necessary for language acquisition.

In all too many cases, teachers have abdicated to school administrators and others much of the classsroom authority and decision making that rightfully is theirs. The results have been the plethora of prescriptive texts and programs which have substituted for thoughtful student-centered pedagogy as publishers have happily rushed to fill the void left by teachers' forfeiture of their pedagogical responsibility. It is no surprise, then, that the status of the teaching profession and, in many places, the quality of teaching have declined, as the seemingly unending wave of educational reform movements begun in 1983 serves to remind us.

But the historical rubble heap of attempts at educational reform stands high, and the current ones will surely join them. Gregory Bateson (1972) tells us that the only difference that matters is the difference that makes a difference. A few extra dollars, even a few thousand extra dollars and some adjustments in teaching conditions, do not constitute a difference that makes a difference. The difference that will, will come only with teacher empowerment, and empowerment, as Freire says, can only come from within and is never imposed from without (Freire, 1970).

Teacher empowerment derives first and foremost from a commitment to a rigorous intellectual life, to a choice to work at an

intellectual depth to which many in education have become unaccustomed. But it is only at this depth that theory is able to unite with practice. The liberating effect of empowerment is the ability to find inside ourselves, through dialogue with others, answers to questions we normally seek from administrators, so-called master teachers, conference presenters and the publishing industry. Only empowered teachers will reform the schools.

And what of student empowerment? This is a question whose answer has profound implications for TESOL professionals and for all educators who are committed to the education of students at risk. I use the term "at risk" cautiously because of the temptation that exists to assign the cause of risk to the student instead of to the society that creates the conditions for some people, mostly minority and working class youth, to have no choice but to be at risk.

I have argued in a recent column in *Idiom* (1987) that race, class, and gender-based inequality are rampant in society and that they are not only reflected in our schools but are in fact reproduced there. But rather than see this as problematic, that is, as something which in itself should be the focus and the subject of education and consequently something that must be probed and questioned, taught, understood and resisted, we often accept inequality and injustice as taken-for-granted, as given, and we go about our lives trying to make the best of a bad situation. We are, after all, teachers, not social activitists. We do language, not politics.

Paulo Freire would disagree. For him, education is a political act and we teachers, like it or not, are political actors. Our actions may manifest themselves in an uncritical, non-reflective response to the conditions we face, but even that is a political statement.

For Freire, empowering education is political education. Just as the liberation of teacher empowerment is derived from teachers, in community and dialogue with others, developing the ability to reach into themselves for solutions to the problems they face, so too must it be with students. For Freire, and for many of us involved in education, student empowerment emerges when students are enabled to become themselves critical of the taken-for-granted assumptions that condition their lives and render them passive. In this view, injustice, inequality, and lack of access, and how schools participate in their construction, become the focus for student analysis.

As educators, we can choose to remain passive and accepting of the current discriminatory social order. We can continue the disempowering role of depositing accepted knowledge into the passive

minds of our students and then evaluating their equally uncritical understandings. This is not empowerment. This is reproduction. The underlying approach, the theory that informs this kind of traditonal pedagogy, is what Freire calls "the banking concept of education" (1970). It is one that maintains that the goal of education is for teachers to produce replicas of themselves and of their value systems. In an exploitative and unjust world, that means reproducing exploitation and injustice.

Education for empowerment, on the other hand, starts with the assumption that knowledge is not a commodity to be transferred from one agent and stored in another. Rather it views education as a process in which students and teachers, in a dialogical interchange, examine given knowledge in critical ways. What emerges from this dynamic is knowledge that the student now owns—knowledge that she or he has actively acquired through engagement and critical reflection.

The current conservative political climate thrives on passive acceptance and silence. The term "silent majority" was more than mere rhetoric on Spiro Agnew's part. Rather it was the fulfillment and, in a perverse sort of way, a validation of what John Dewey back in the 1920s identified as a growing national pathology: namely, the erosion of an articulate people, coming together in a public space in conjoint activity and critical dialogue (Dewey, 1927).

Last night I suggested that the movement to make English the official language of the United States is immoral. I believe that is so because of what I sense to be its hidden agenda, namely, to silence, to render voiceless, large segments of American society.

As TESOL professionals, we work with students who are silenced in a variety of ways. They are silenced by their inability to use English as a medium for dialogue and for self-expression; and they are silenced as well by lack of access, by inequity and inequality. I see our task as dealing with both silences. Yes, we must help students to develop an English voice to be sure, but we need to help them as well to develop another kind of voice, a political voice, one that rejects as invalid the silence of the silent majority and one that can be used to demand a piece of the dream that America claims is available to all.

Language teaching has changed, I have suggested, as a result of our new understanding of how languages are acquired and by our interest in working with students in the learning process. These developments make meaningful the role for critical pedagogy in the

language learning classroom. Critical pedagogy seeks to empower students through dialogue to achieve greater levels of social understanding and control. I commend the work of Freire to you and hope that this weekend together, devoted to ways of thinking about how we can help our students realize the dream, and my remarks this evening, have inspired you in some small way at least to begin the process of empowerment through language teaching, and to lead the way, as we have so often in the past, for educators in other disciplines to follow. Thank you.

REFERENCES

Anthony, E. M. (1972). Approach, method, and technique. In H. B. Allen and R. N. Campbell (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second language: A book of readings*. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York: Ballantine.

Blair, R. W. (Ed.). (1982). *Innovative approaches to language teaching*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Burling, R. (1982). *Sounding right*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Carrell, P. L. & Eisterhold, J. C. (1983). Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly, 17*, 553-573.

Curran, C. A. (1976). *Counseling-learning in second language learning*. Apple River, IL: Apple River Press.

Dewey, J. (1927). *The public and its problems*. Chicago: Swallow Press.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum Press.

Gass, S. M. & Madden, C. G. (Eds.). (1985). *Input in second language acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Gattegno, C. (1972). *Teaching foreign languages in the schools: The silent way*. 2nd ed. New York: Educational Solutions.

Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. New York: Pergamon Press.

Krashen, S. D. (1985). *Insights and inquiries*. Hayward, CA: Alemany Press.

Lydon, J. A. (1987, Fall). From the president's desk. *Idiom 17*, 2.

Murphy, John M. (1985). *Investigation into the Listening Strategies of ESL College Students*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Nadler, H. (1983). Unpublished plenary speech. New York State TESOL Conference, Smithtown, New York.

Oller, Jr. J. & Richard-Amato, P. (Eds.). (1983). *Methods that work: A smorgasbord of ideas for language teachers*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Raimes, A. (1985). What unskilled ESL students do as they write: A classroom study of composing. *TESOL Quarterly, 19*, 229-258.

Smith, F. (1982). *Understanding reading*. 3rd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Zamel, V. (1985). Responding to student reading. *TESOL Quarterly, 19*, 79-101.